SOCIETY OF FORMER AGENTS

# MR. HOOVER'S LOYAL LEGION

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The annual convention of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI might again have passed unnoticed last fall had not Spiro Agnew been the featured speaker. The press showed up at Atlanta's posh Regency Hyatt House, and although rapped by the Vice President and the program chairman and pointedly left unfed at lunch, dutifully reported the speech. "Our traditional concept of success," Agnew told his well-tailored-and-barbered audience, "makes the ultraliberal nose twitch with distaste, as though it has sensed a vaguely unpleasant odor." The former G-men greeted his familiar philippics with a standing ovation.

Despite this coverage, few newspaper readers had the remotest idea of the success J. Edgar Hoover's alumni have had in penetrating the highest echelons of the nation's security-industrial complex, or in populating the Congress, the Executive, the Judiciary and state and local governments.

As an index, there are eleven Society members in the House of Representatives, foremost among them being H. Allen Smith, ranking Republican on the powerful Rules Committee. Four hold key staff positions on the House Internal Security Committee. The chiefs of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Secret Service, IRS Intelligence Division and Post Office Inspectors belong to the Society. So do the security directors of major defense contractors, large corporations and the National Football League. Many public law-enforcement and private investigative agencies are dominated by Society members. The Governor of New Jersey carries a card, as does the attorney general of California, who aspires to be that state's governor in 1974.

The Society, with headquarters in the Statler Hilton in New York, claims approximately 5,200 members. It was founded in 1937 with slightly more than 100 members and the motto: "Loyalty—Goodwill—Friendship." The motivation seems to have been an American Legion-like camaraderie among men who fancied themselves front-line veterans of the war against crime. To this day, the pages of the Society's monthly *Grapevine* drip with nostalgia for the Dillinger days. A recent article, for example, lamented the passing of a member who had helped "set the trap for John Dillinger in front of the Biograph Theatre in Chicago on July 22, 1934," and ran a news photo of the agent, in two-tone shoes and straw boater, standing behind the hearse that carried away the remains of Public Enemy No. One. Another issue published an article by a charter member, entitled "G-Men Cut Gangsters Down to Size in Blazing 1920s." It told how "the FBI stepped in with brilliant detective work and undaunted courage under the matchless leadership of J. Edgar Hoover." Nothing in *Grapevine* tampers with the legend. No mention is made, for instance, that the infamous Lady in Red who set up Dillinger for the kill was actually a paid informer of the private Hargrave Secret Service, and an announcement that a member newly elected to a California judgeship took part "under J. Edgar Hoover's leadership in the capture of Roger 'The Terrible' Touhy" fails to recall that the FBI had erroneously seized Touhy for the 1933 Hamm kidnapping, a caper actually pulled off by Alvin "Kreepy" Karpis.

The bond of experiences shared lures the Exes, as they call themselves, to Society luncheons, dinners, dances, parties, ceremonial functions and days at ballparks and race tracks. A meeting of the Los Angeles chapter was addressed not long ago by Jeremiah O'Leary, a Washington *Star* reporter through whom the FBI plants its stories.